

ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL PROTECTION WEEK 2026

Empowered Lives, Resilient Futures

6–8 October • ADB Headquarters, Manila



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Scaling Economic Inclusion: Pathways Out of Poverty through Social Protection Systems

Framing Presentation

6 October 2026





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Extreme poverty has fallen, but deep and multidimensional deprivation persists, pointing to why we need economic inclusion programs

THE CHALLENGE

Asia and the Pacific, 2025

508 million

live below \$4.20 a day (lower-middle-income income poverty line)

135 million

live in extreme poverty below \$3.0 per day

~12%

of people are multidimensionally poor, facing overlapping deprivations

Economic vulnerability remains high



Demographic
transitions



Climate
events



Changing
forms of work



Global
disruptions

Poverty and vulnerability is multidimensional.

No single intervention can address this.

THE RESPONSE

Economic inclusion programs provide a bundle of coordinated, time-bound, and sequenced interventions that address the multiple constraints faced by poor and vulnerable people – providing them a pathway out of poverty and into sustainable livelihoods.

Also called the poverty graduation approach, cash plus programming, or productive inclusion

Flexible: can be built onto existing government programs and adapted to country contexts

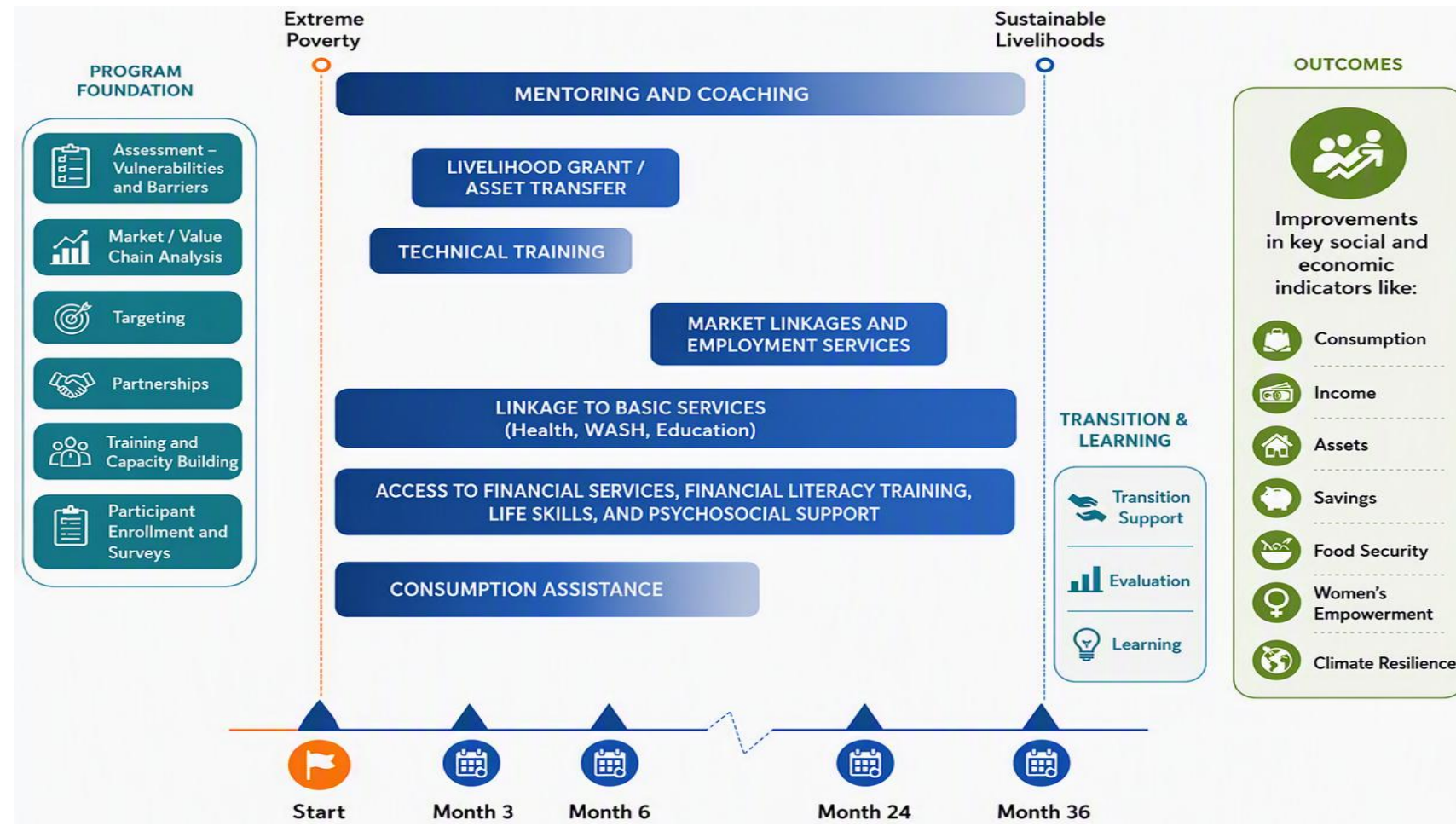


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Economic inclusion programs provide time-bound and sequenced support to tackle multiple constraints





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Evidence shows consistent gains, but programs currently reach only a fraction of those in need

Average impacts of graduation programs pooled across randomized evaluations

Consumption

+\$38.1/mo

11%

Income

+\$28.1/mo

15%

Assets

+\$282

40%

Food security

+0.20 SD

Mental health

+0.10 SD

Women's agency

+0.09 SD

Empowerment

+0.08 SD

Savings*

+\$55

REACH VERSUS NEED

70M+

people benefit, directly or indirectly, from 405 programs in 88 countries

~1 in 10

of the world's people in extreme poverty are reached, by World Bank estimates

Nearly 3/4

of participants are in government-led programs

What else the evidence tells us



Components reinforce each other: Comprehensive package has greater and more long-lasting effect than standalone interventions



Sustainable impact for several years: gains persisted 7–10 years in Bangladesh and India

Sources:

Carter, Jee, Karlan & Premand, "Doing Better at Doing Good: Lessons from a Bayesian Meta-Analysis After 20 Years of Poverty Graduation Programs" (scan QR).

PEI, The State of Economic Inclusion Report 2024 (data as of Feb 2024). World Bank press release, 20 Nov 2024 (relative to ~700 million people in extreme poverty, measured before the June 2025 poverty-line update).

Banerjee, Karlan, Osei, Trachtman & Udry (2022), J. Dev. Econ. 155.





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The question has therefore shifted from whether economic inclusion programs work to how we can effectively scale them

EXAMPLE OF TENSIONS TO NAVIGATE

Standardization



Adaptation

Intensity



Coverage

Quality



Affordability

CAPABILITIES GOVERNMENTS NEED TO BUILD



Coverage

How many poor and vulnerable households need to be reached?



Policy and vision

Does the policy framework create an enabling environment?



Financing

Is the financing dedicated, predictable and adequate to meet these goals?



Delivery systems

Are there delivery systems ready deliver this at scale?



Coordination

How do we strengthen institutions, partnerships, and coordination?



Frontline capacity

Do frontline staff have the capacity to deliver quality support?

Learning and adaptation across all of the above

How can governments institutionalize and scale economic inclusion and poverty graduation approaches through national social protection systems while maintaining effectiveness, affordability, and impact?